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Tokens: From the Caves at Sao Paolo

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Tokens: From the Caves at Sao Paolo

We parade down the street like children,
Three of us, holding hands, you
me and Tomas, whom you have known
even before the birth of his eight year old
daughter, Clarissa. She gives us
buttons, pretend tokens for the caves.
Chickens follow us in the street
and then drop off when we arrive.
Tomas leaves Clarissa outside to
guard them, these chickens who do
not understand “guarding” but seem to
tolerate Clarissa, a child.

Yellow hats, flashlights tied
around our necks with white string,
we feel our way down through the mouth
of the cave. Bracing one hand on
the rocks, holding the other
over my face to keep out the odor,
mildew, old water somewhere beneath us
in the dark, I focus on the valley
between Tomas’ narrow shoulders.
Gravel crumbles behind me, and, for one
betrayed instant I don’t want you
close to me, not behind me where,
if you slip, I must whip around
to catch you or fall with you, I
would have to face you and you would see
my yellow face floating in the halo
of this flashlight.

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Tomas continues, familiar, chameleon,
his body takes on the shape of the rocks.
The crevices wait to be filled
by his fingers. "Look up,
" he says.

The roof of the cave, like the ridged
inside of my mouth, opens up to Tomas'
light. We three floating faces look up.
We are only heads inside here, not
bodies. I have no body, Tomas' hand
is not cupping the back of my neck,
is not feeling its way down the crevice
between my shoulders. You are not
holding my free hand. We are just faces
craning toward the light Tomas points,
just standing, holding hands
like children.